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Reagan leak drive is unusually stringent

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Washington—The crackdown on information "leaks" is a familiar phenomenon in this city of hypersensitive officials, but the one just ordered by the Reagan White House aims to go further than most in plugging outlets and fixing responsibility in the name of national security.

The Pentagon already has begun to give lie detector tests—and to encounter some refusals—and under White House direction is planning interview rules even more stringent than those imposed 20 years ago.

In the presidency of John F. Kennedy, who could raise a ruckus over leaks, his defense secretary, Robert S. McNamara, ordered that discussions between officials and reporters be monitored by Pentagon public relations officers. The officials or the press agents were to write memoranda on the contents of interviews.

It hardly needs to be said that this had a chilling effect, at least for a while.

But the rules emanating from the White House now go beyond that. Whether they will be more successful

than Mr. McNamara's in stopping the leaks is an open question.

As of now, however, the plan is said to be this: Whenever a reporter wants to interview an official on something to do with national security, the cabinet officer of the department concerned must be informed, give his assent, "coordinate" with the White House and see that an internal memo is prepared on what the reporter was told.

"They're overreacting," an official said yesterday. "We're going to look silly for a while."

The White House view was entirely different, of course. An official there said there had been some very serious breaches of security through the unauthorized dissemination of classified data, and it decided that strong measures must be taken.

Naturally enough, the official refused to cite the examples. The argument here is always that to cite actual cases would be to let adversaries know more than they already may have figured out.

The only example given to fortify President Reagan's case for the crackdown ordered Tuesday is that of the *Washington Post* account Monday of plans for airplane sales to Taiwan.

The *Post*, as the administration confirmed the same day, reported a decision against selling Taiwan more advanced versions of the F-5 airplanes it now has.

The trouble was, officials contended, that John H. Holdridge, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, was to lay out the plan to Chinese officials in Peking,

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which has taken a hard line not only against U.S. selling of advanced weapons to Taiwan but against continuation of existing supply arrangements.

The leak was embarrassing to the administration—so officials contended—touching on relations with a very sensitive China with which America seeks stronger accord. It came when this country wanted a broad front, including China, against developments in Poland.

Obviously, there are those who raise questions about the genuine national security implications, since the Taiwan sale hardly could be kept secret and, indeed, was officially an-

nounced soon after the report was published.

The evidence is clear, in any case, that a crackdown on leaks was in the making sometime before the Taiwan report.

As long ago as mid-April, 1981, Frank C. Carlucci, the deputy defense secretary, issued orders to top military and civilian officials in the Pentagon to stop unauthorized disclosures.

Mr. Carlucci did not limit himself to warnings about leaking secrets. He told officials to be "circumspect" in discussing non-secret matters as well "when they relate to sensitive internal deliberations."

In the latter admonition, Mr. Carlucci, wittingly or unwittingly, came close to what has always seemed to observers to be the more worrisome issue for officials—that of having their deliberations known through leaks before they were ready to announce them.

The Reagan crackdown came later than such moves have in some previous administrations. Usually they occur when administrations perceive that they are having troubles in their public—as well as foreign—relations.